



# PAT STRACHOTA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

## Written Testimony In Support of AB 31 Submitted by Representative Pat Strachota

Chairman Honadel and members of the Committee, I thank you for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 31.

AB 31 is a very straightforward and simple bill, it eliminates the accumulated sick leave credit for legislators, justices and judges, and all other state elected officials.

As we are in the midst of cold and flu season, taking a sick day is a common occurrence in most offices. However, when an elected official is ill, do they take a sick day? When I was first elected two years ago, I took the job knowing it would be a 24 hour, 7 days a week commitment I was making to the citizens of the 58th district. The thought of receiving sick pay never even crossed my mind.

In Washington County none of our elected officials receive sick leave and there is no reason for any elected official at any level of government to receive this benefit.

Ultimately, this is not sick leave as most employees in the private sector receive it. It is a retirement benefit and if we as elected officials wish to continue receiving it we should debate the merits of it as a retirement benefit.

State employees who reach age 55 and have twenty or more years of state service are allowed to convert unused sick time into extending their health insurance benefits. When retirees die, the benefit passes to their spouses and dependants if they already are insured under the state program. However, legislators and constitutional officers do not need 20 or more years of state service in order to convert this into health insurance benefits at age 55.

I see no hardship in eliminating sick leave for elected officials as it is not even being used by most elected officials. To illustrate:

- **Legislative branch:** Prior to media reports only two legislators had used sick leave in the past four years and 22 lawmakers qualify for more than \$50,000 in benefits.
- **Constitutional Officers:** Former Attorney General Lautenschlager was the only one of six constitutional officers to use sick leave.
- **Judicial Branch:**
  - 207 of the state's 235 circuit court judges took no sick leave in 2005
  - In 2005, 6 of 7 Supreme Court Justices recorded no sick time
  - 12 of 16 appeals court judges recorded no sick time

Thank you again for holding this hearing today and I urge the committee to pass AB 31.

Testimony of State Senator Ted Kanavas  
Assembly Committee on Labor and Industry  
Assembly Bill 31  
Wednesday, February 7, 2007  
225 Northwest, State Capitol

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Thank you Chairman Honadel and members of the Assembly Committee on Labor and Industry for affording me the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 31. The bill before the Committee is nearly identical to the bill I circulated in the Senate, which eliminates the accumulated sick leave credit for legislators, justices and judges, and all other state elected officials.

I believe people seeking state elected office should do so not for the benefits which accompany the office, but rather to serve the best interest of their constituents. I urge the Committee to act upon this bill so that it can be debated by both houses of the legislature as soon as possible.

Under current law, legislators and other officials elected to state office, receive a paid sick leave credit, as part of his or her compensation. Any unclaimed credits carry over to the following calendar year. If the elected official does not use all of their sick leave credits at the time they leave office, the accumulated sick leave may be used to pay for postretirement health insurance premiums. Assembly Bill 31 prohibits state elected officials from accumulating sick leave year to year.

For too long, elected officials have been accumulating a benefit with little or no oversight. As you know, elected officials do not have what most people would consider a typical 9-5 job. Legislators do not keep track of their hours on a time sheet, they do not record taking time off for a doctor's appointment, and for the most part, they do not claim sick time.

Widespread accounts in the media indicate a lack of sick leave reporting, a large accumulation of sick leave credits, and a clearly demonstrated need for reform. I am confident this bill will reform our current sick leave credit program and help restore public trust in elected officials.

Senator Darling and I, as well as many other legislators, have been vocal about our intention to decline accumulated sick leave credits. We sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Robson requesting Senate action on the bill as soon as possible, but have yet to receive a response. We hope that she will take this bill up on the Senate floor as soon as possible.

Again, thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit testimony. I appreciate your time and urge a positive vote out of committee on this bill.